



## NATO operations make modern bomber history

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LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Va. (ACCNS) - When five B-1B bombers were ordered to deploy to Europe in support of NATO operations in Yugoslavia March 29 it marked a milestone in modern bomber history.

Operation Allied Force is the first time the Air Force's heavy bomber fleet - the B-2 Spirit, B-52 Stratofortress and B-1B Lancer - are used together operationally, according to Maj. J.C. Valle, deputy chief of Air Combat Command's Weapons and Tactics Branch.

"This major milestone for the bomber force, shows the pride and professionalism of the entire Air Combat Command team," said Lt. Gen. Tom Keck, ACC vice commander. "We're also proving that the Air Force is ready and continues to employ the Expeditionary Aerospace Force concept."

The B-2 stealth bomber made its operational debut March 24 when two Spirits dropped 32 2,000 pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions during a 31-hour, non-stop mission from Whiteman AFB, Mo.

"The jets performed perfectly and the crews performed even better," said Brig. Gen. Leroy Barnidge, 509th Bomb Wing commander.

The B-2's low-observable, or "stealth," characteristics give it the unique ability to penetrate an enemy's most sophisticated defenses and threaten its most valued, and heavily defended, targets. During the



A B-2 Spirit stealth bomber rolls out of its shelter at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo. The B-2 made its operational debut Mar. 24 when two bombers dropped 32, 2,000-pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions on targets in Yugoslavia. (Courtesy photo)



operation the B-2 is being used in a direct attack role employing Global Positioning System-guided munitions, said Valle.

Six B-52s from Barksdale AFB, La., were sent to Royal Air Force Base Fairford, England, Feb. 17 and took place in the first wave of airstrikes March 24. Four additional B-52 bombers and about 30 people from the 5th Bomb Wing at Minot AFB, N.D., were ordered to deploy RAF Fairford Mar. 27.

The B-52 is a long-range, heavy bomber that can perform air interdiction, offensive counter-air and maritime operations. The B-52 is being used as a stand off missile shooter during the operation, said Valle.

The B-1 is the backbone of the bomber fleet, and provides massive firepower including general-purpose unguided weapons, cluster bomb units, and GPS-guided weapons. The B-1 carries more weapons than any other weapon system in the USAF, according to Valle.

The B-1B made its operational debut Dec. 1 over the skies of Iraq during Operation Desert Fox.

While the milestone is important historically, the much more important factor operationally is integrating all three bombers with the other Combat Air Forces' assets, he said.

"Integrating all aspects of combat airpower is the key to successful bomber employment."

A B-52H Stratofortress from Barksdale Air Force Base, La., takes to the skies at Royal Air Force Fairford, England. The B-52s are forward deployed to RAF Fairford to support NATO operations in Kosovo. (Photo by Senior Airman Jeff Fitch)



A B-1B takes off during a training mission. The aircraft were ordered to deploy in support of ongoing NATO operations by Defense Secretary William Cohen Mar. 29. (Courtesy photo)

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